

Community Innovation Challenge Grant

APPLICATION

Application deadline: January 17, 2012

Submission Instructions: This application form and all supporting documents must be submitted electronically **by January 17, 2012** to:
CICgrants@state.ma.us

Please read the Grant Guidelines before completing this application. Applications will not be considered complete unless all requested information is provided. Signoff by participating entities must be included (see form at end of application). Applications received after the deadline will not be considered.

For more information, contact:

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Executive Office for Administration and Finance

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Community Innovation Challenge Grant

APPLICATION

Project title: Reconfiguration Planning of the Public Schools of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury Massachusetts.

Amount requested: \$130,000

Identify the lead applicant entity:

The Town of Shutesbury, MA

Lead applicant primary contact:

First Name, Last Name: Elaine, Puleo

Name of Municipality, School, RPA or COG: The Town of Shutesbury, MA

Phone Number: 413-259-1979

Email Address: epuleo@schoolph.umass.edu

Lead applicant secondary contact:

First Name, Last Name: Becky Torres

Name of Municipality, School, RPA or COG: Shutesbury, MA

Phone Number: 413-259-1214

Email Address: townadmin@shutesbury.org

Check type of participating entities:

- ☐ Two or more municipalities seeking to collaborate
- ☐ Regional school(s)
- ☒ **School districts considering forming a regional school district or regionalizing services**
- ☐ Regional planning agency or council of government
- ☐ Local government entity and non-profit seeking to collaborate
- ☐ Single municipality (for internal efficiency grant proposal)

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List all participating entities:

The Town of Amherst through its Regional School District Planning Committee

The Town of Leverett through its Regional School District Planning Committee

The Town of Pelham through its Regional School District Planning Committee

The Town of Shutesbury through its Regional School District Planning Committee

Purpose of the grant:

The four towns of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury have been discussing options for regionalization every 10-15 years since the 1960's. The financial resources provided by this grant will hopefully end this 50-year long exploration, providing the needed facts to guide an orderly and effective reconfiguration for K-12 education in these four towns.

The most recent cycle of active discussion began in 2009 after the towns missed the deadline for applying for the previous regionalization grant offered through DESE. Following this missed opportunity, representatives from each town's Select Board, Finance Committee and School Committee met regularly in order to be prepared if and when subsequent regionalization grants were available. This joint committee researched various reconfiguration options using only volunteer efforts to gather financial and educational data from the towns. Legal and governance research were not financially possible. A final report was developed and publicly shared in June 2010. (the Final Report and Recommendations can be found at <http://www.arps.org/node/2664>) This report was unanimously accepted by the Amherst Pelham 7-12 Regional School Committee.

There is a history of decades of collaboration among these four towns, dating back to the formation of the Amherst-Pelham 7-12 Regional School District in 1953 and the addition of Leverett and Shutesbury to it in 1955. Several 4-town meetings of school committees, finance committees and Select boards take place annually. In seeking to clarify and realize the potential of bringing all schools of all four towns under one central office, we continue to build on this history of shared services.

The current K-12 configuration consists of:

1. A single 4 town regional grades 7-12 school district with approximately 1600 students
2. Union 26 consisting of Amherst and Pelham grades K-6 with approximately 1300 students which shares central office and superintendent services with the 4 town region

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3. Union 28 consisting of Leverett and Shutesbury with Erving, Wendell and New Salem grades K-6 with approximately 300 students from Leverett and Shutesbury. (Note that Erving, Wendell and New Salem are not part of the regionalization discussion). Union 28 has a central office that is separate from that of Union 26 and the 7-12 regions with a different superintendent.

In Fall 2011, the Town Meetings of each of the four towns separately voted to create Regional School District Planning Committees (RSDPCs), consistent with MGL and in preparation for more formal discussions about reconfiguration. A first meeting of all four RSDPC's was held in December 2012; all present affirmed an interest in working to explore various reconfiguration options.

The overarching purpose of this grant proposal is to seek to unify the K-12 public education of these four towns under one central administrative office with one superintendent.

Benefits:

The following are potential areas of **Cost Savings**:

Central administrative office efficiency - Cost savings would be in the form of personnel reduction, single communication reporting to state DOE, merging of technology, payroll and accounting functions.

Pooling resources – Cost savings would be in the form of optimizing staffing to allow for diverse educational opportunities for all students to be shared throughout the region, in Special Education as well as regular education.

Regional transportation – Cost savings would be realized by being able to apply for regional transportation reimbursement costs for all schools.

The following are potential **Benefits**:

As the previous round of DESE regionalization grants demonstrated, regionalization of schools in Western Massachusetts does not necessarily result in cost savings. However, depending upon the reconfiguration approach adopted, there may be some savings for some of the four districts, while other districts may see increases. This detailed information is exactly what our towns need to know before a Town Meeting can approve any governance changes.

The more significant benefits are in educational cohesion and coordination. Currently Leverett and Shutesbury are part of Superintendent Union #28, along with three other towns. Amherst

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and Pelham comprise Superintendency Union #26 which shares a Superintendent and central office with the current 7-12 region. Therefore the 4 towns operate their schools under 2 distinct central offices and 2 superintendents. This results in a lack of coordination. For example, professional development days cannot be shared. Nor is curriculum development nor student information coordinated at the K-6 level, thereby creating gaps and inconsistencies at the start of middle school when all four towns regionalize for secondary education.

Additional benefits will be experienced in reporting – both for the district and for the Commonwealth. Currently, there are four separate K-6 districts plus the secondary region. A reconfiguration plan can result in fewer reports; clearly a benefit for all concerned.

Among the other benefits would be more effective use of resources; the ability to attract better educators (offer a fulltime position rather than part-time for the small separate districts), and provision of SPED supports.

Need for funding:

The four towns, having engaged in regionalization discussions in the 1960's, 1970's, 1980's, 1990's and the recent 2009-11 period. It is clear that without professional capacity brought to this complex issue, change will not occur. Repeatedly the towns, despite genuine interest, can only reach a certain level of understanding before planning bogs down. It is the hope of all involved in this application that with professional financial, legal and educational experts, the data collected will guide the towns to an acceptable plan. Notably, since any change will require a Town Meeting vote, the data gathered will be essential for informing the voting populace.

At present there is no capacity for the towns to conduct the necessary research despite the past two years of trying. Local capacity to gather and analyze the financial data is limited and therefore not practical. Legal and governance/organizational expertise is not available and will need to be identified. While educational expertise is available, there may be analysis regarding the specific benefits of each reconfiguration plan that bring greater understanding to the options.

Each town has assets and liabilities that vary considerably. For example,

- Shutesbury has nearly paid off its school remodeling bond while Leverett has not.
- The town of Amherst owns and maintains its own fleet of school busses. None of the other towns do.
- Each town has health insurance obligations for retirees; the number of current and future retirees and dependents, the benefits and the costs vary

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- Health coverage for employees of Amherst, Pelham, and the current 7-12 region are in a self-insurance plan that has costs and benefits more favorable than GIC while Shutesbury and Leverett are not included
- Among the 4 towns Amherst has the largest number of Special Needs Educational Programs. This provides potential for the smaller towns to benefit from sharing in this.

Cost impact:

The investigation would include a town by town fiscal impact statement.

Leverett and Shutesbury:

For these two towns the overriding new cost would likely be related to the need to bring their lower salaries in line with those of Amherst and Pelham since presumably in any reconfiguration, faculty and staff of all four towns will participate in one teacher/staff collective bargaining agreement. It has been discussed that the increase in salaries might be phased in so that the towns can plan for and absorb the costs.

Pelham:

Since Pelham is already closely coordinated with Amherst through a shared superintendent and central office, it has been raised that Pelham may have greater administrative costs under some of the possible reconfiguration options. This would need to be confirmed (or not) by the research provided by this grant.

Amherst:

At this point, we are unable to identify any major new costs to Amherst.

Measures of success:

As mentioned at the outset, the four towns of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury have been periodically exploring forms of regionalization since the towns came together in the Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools in 1955 and 1957 to provide secondary education (grades 7-12). However, despite this 10-15 year cycle of discussion, which involved town officials meeting and working for many hours over long periods, there has been no change. With a notable change in the MGL allowing towns to pull out of a Superintendency Union (not available before 2010), the current cycle of discussions offers a more expedient path to reconfiguration.

The grant request is for professional services that can provide the necessary information to the towns to guide them toward the most appropriate reconfiguration plan. Given this, success will be measured by the following:

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1. A deliverable from the consultants hired that provides detailed analysis of the various reconfiguration plans and provides a guide for the towns to make a recommendation regarding implementation.
2. A vote by the 4 Regional School District Planning Committees (acting as one or as four independent bodies) to approve a common recommendation.
3. Appropriate actions initiated by the towns to implement the agreed upon recommendation.
4. Increased coordination between schools with respect to curriculum development.
5. Reduced administrative burden at the local and state level.
6. Efficiency at the administrative level with respect to a joint central office and a single superintendent
7. Achieving the highest quality of education common to all four towns.

Project budget for requested amount:

There are three primary areas of expense for the proposed activities: consultant analysis, legal, and administrative.

Consultant Expertise

The primary expenses for this grant will be to secure professional expertise and services to analyze the educational systems and the identified reconfiguration options mutually agreed upon for analysis. Professional services will include:

Financial analysis.

While due diligence will need to be undertaken and an RFP will need to be released, initial research has indicated that consultants will cost approximately \$950/day.

Legal analysis

While due diligence will need to be undertaken and an RFP will need to be released, initial research has indicated that consultants will cost approximately \$220/hour.

Educational analysis

While due diligence will need to be undertaken and an RFP will need to be released, initial research has indicated that consultants will cost approximately \$ 950/day.

SUBTOTAL FOR CONSULTANTS: \$75,000

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Legal Work

Once an analysis is completed and an agreed upon reconfiguration plan is approved, regional agreement(s) will need to be drafted. Legal fees for drafting the necessary documents to be voted upon by the towns will be required.

While due diligence will need to be undertaken and an RFP will need to be released, initial research has indicated that likely attorneys will cost approximately \$220/hour

While we are in the process of reconfiguration, we will need legal services to help draft new collective bargaining agreements with faculty and staff. Although we do not anticipate the collective bargaining agreements to be finalized in this 1 year time frame, we will use funds to begin the process. Attorney costs will again be estimated at \$220/hour

SUBTOTAL FOR LEGAL COSTS: \$45,000

Administrative Costs

Associated with the process will be a range of administrative costs such as printing of documents for committee use and public access, notices, distribution, travel, etc.

SUBTOTAL FOR ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS: \$ 5,000

Contingency

Since the towns have never fully completed this process during the past 50 years, it is conceivable that an unknown service or activity will be required. Given the continued poor economy, none of the towns are in a position to pay for this process directly. Therefore, rather than risk delay or failure due to unforeseen expenses, the project is building in a \$5,000 contingency.

SUBTOTAL FOR CONTINGENCY: \$5,000

TOTAL REQUESTED FOR THIS GRANT: \$130,000

Project timeline:

The proposed timeline below allows the towns sufficient time to determine what the consultant studies with respect to enrollment trends and projections, expense projections, income projections and demographics specific to each town.

The prospective consultants will be interviewed at a joint meeting of all four towns' RSDPCs. The choice of consultants to be hired would require a majority vote of members of each of the 4 towns' RSDPCs. Fortunately in the last 5 years, 4 new regions have been formed across the

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state, therefore we expect to be able to benefit from their experience and their consultant recommendations.

Timeline Table:

Activity/ 2012	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Write RFP to hire consultants	X	X									
Formulate information gaps that need to be addressed by consultants		X	X								
Data gathering by consultants			X	X	X						
Preliminary report from consultants					X						
Regional school district planning committees fine tune the report						X	X				
Public forums presenting the report								X			
Acceptance of findings by 4 town Select Boards									X		
Attorney drafting (as necessary) a reconfiguration agreement									X	X	
Special Town meetings (as necessary) to ratify new configuration										X	
Beginning of restructuring where appropriate											X
Collective Bargaining draft documents									X	X	X

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Identify innovative aspects of proposal:

The challenges faced by the four towns of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury may not be unique; however the long-term relationships and willingness to engage in multi-town exploration over decades provides a valuable opportunity to explore innovative solutions to disparate priorities. These mixed priorities and inherent tensions can likely be seen in municipalities throughout the Commonwealth.

For example, all educational research shows that small class size is an important goal with clear positive results. At least the three smaller towns excel in this area. While regionalization does not automatically mean larger classes, it may mean some changes. Similarly, there is a clear and central tension between local control of curriculum and staffing and the benefits from regionalization such as greater cohesion and increased capacity.

The goal of this grant is to explore several reconfiguration options that would enable the four towns to develop acceptable and appropriate regionalization solutions that acknowledge the financial, governance and educational priorities of each town. These options may include a K-12 region, with or without Innovation schools, or they may include two K-6 regions that feed into the longstanding 7-12 secondary system for all four towns. Based on the research and subsequent discussions, additional innovative solutions may be recommended. In all cases, the information and solutions explored can be shared throughout the Commonwealth as appropriate.

Potential applicability to other local governments:

This work can be a model for other communities with similar challenges. We will map out a path to bring disparate communities to the table to overcome financial roadblocks, ensure that small towns have sufficient autonomy and representation and provide a solid framework for being able to maintain excellent services in the most efficient way. Innovative programs in the public school system will keep students and families within our district from looking elsewhere for Charter or private school options. This maintains the vibrancy of both the schools and the communities in which they are located.

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Evidence of commitment among applicants/participants:

Evidence of commitment by the four towns is given by

1. Formulation of regional school district planning committees (as per MGL Chapter 71, Section 14) approved by each of the Town Meetings' votes in Fall 2011.
2. Agreement with this written proposal by each of the Select Boards of the four respective towns. Signature of Chair of the Select Board below attests to this agreement. (Note: Each Select Board reviewed this proposal and voted on approval. At the time of application, the meeting minutes which included these votes were only in draft form and thus were not available for inclusion. In two of the respective towns, the entire Select Board was present for signatures on the final application. For the remaining two, only the Chair was available. Meeting minutes confirming the vote of the entire board will be sent upon ratification).

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LOCAL SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION FORM

Project Title: Reconfiguration Planning for the Public Schools of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury Massachusetts.

Lead applicant primary contact:

First Name, Last Name: Elaine Puleo

Name of Municipality, School, RPA or COG: Shutesbury, MA.

Phone Number: 413-259-1979

Email Address: epuleo@schoolph.umass.edu

List all participating entities:

Amherst, MA Leverett, MA Pelham, MA Shutesbury, MA

Sign on behalf of the Applicants:



Signature

Entity

ALBERT SPRINGER

Print Name

SELECTMEN

Title



Signature

shutesbury selectmen

Entity

J April Stein

Print Name

selectmen/shutesbury

Title

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LOCAL SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION FORM (continued)


Signature

Town of Shutesbury
Entity

Elaine Puleo
Print Name

Select Board Chair
Title

Signature

Entity

Print Name

Title

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Amherst, MA Leverett, MA Pelham, MA Shutesbury, MA

Sign on behalf of the Applicants:

Signature



Entity

Amherst Select Board

Print Name

Stephanie J. O'Keefe

Title

Chair

Signature

Entity

Print Name

Title

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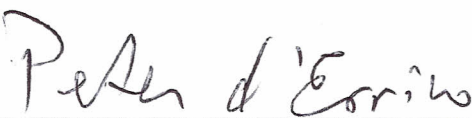
List all participating entities:

Amherst, MA Leverett, MA Pelham, MA Shutesbury, MA


Sign on behalf of the Applicants:



Signature



Print Name



Entity



Title



Signature



Print Name



Entity



Title

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LOCAL SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION FORM (continued)

Julia Shively

Signature

Leverett

Entity

Julie Shively

Print Name

Select board member

Title

Signature

Entity

Print Name

Title

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Phone Number: 413-259-1979

Email Address: epuleo@schoolph.umass.edu

List all participating entities:

Amherst, MA Leverett, MA Pelham, MA Shutesbury, MA

Sign on behalf of the Applicants:

William Martell

Signature

Pelham

Entity

WILLIAM MARTELL

Print Name

Chair Selectboard

Title

Signature

Entity

Print Name

Title